



*An Introduction*

## *York Factory Issue*

THIS summer the historic fur post of York Factory, on the west coast of Hudson Bay, was closed after two hundred and seventy-five years of trading with the Indians. Such continuity of endeavour in one spot is rare in a young country like Canada; and as York Fort was for so long the most important settlement in the North and West, it is fitting that the *Beaver* should devote a whole issue to its history.

York was the great coastal depot of the fur trade—the heart which pumped the life blood of exploration and commerce throughout the network of trade routes spread across the western wilderness. It was the place where all the trade goods for this immense area were received by sea from Britain and repacked for inland distribution; and where all the furs bartered for those goods were collected and stowed on board the Company's transatlantic ships, bound for the markets of the Old World. It was also the first of many "Gateways to the West"—the spot where the twin rivers, Nelson and Hayes, that led the canoeist to Lake Winnipeg and on into the far west, joined their waters with the sea. And because of this, it was early recognized by both British and French as the logical place for the headquarters of the North American fur trade.

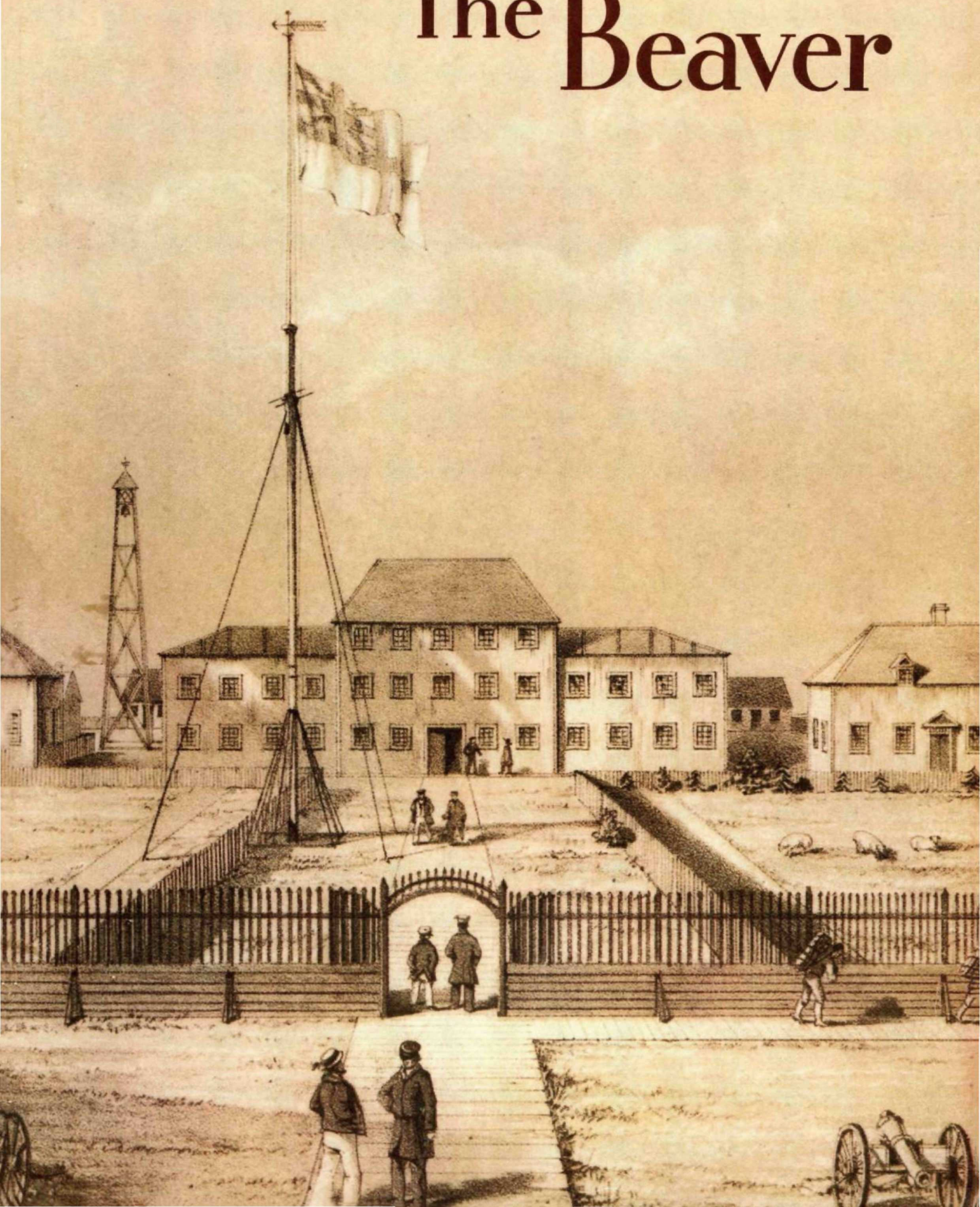
The number of famous and lesser-known northern men who lived at, or passed through, York Factory, is legion. Great explorers like Kelsey, Henday, Thompson, Franklin, Richardson, and

Rae, set out from there on historic expeditions. And in later times famous northern travellers like Bell and Tyrrell stayed there. Governor George Simpson started from there on his two record-breaking transcontinental trips of 1824 and 1828. And under his determined chairmanship the Council of the Northern Department of Rupert's Land, governing body of the greater part of what is now Canada, met there on several occasions.

Here in this issue you will find the life of York Factory dealt with under several headings, and in every case except the last the period covered is that of 1682 to 1900. The collecting of notes and illustrations and the writing of the articles has entailed a great deal of research, mainly on the part of the Archives staff of the Hudson's Bay Company in London. For although odd facets of York's history have been dealt with in various books and articles, nothing comprehensive has ever been attempted until now.

Yet this can be no more than an outline of York's long story. The little human details that breathe life into a tale have been barely touched upon. Readers will find them in such books as *James Isham's Observations* (1949), the *Letters of Letitia Hargrave* (1947), and R. M. Ballantyne's *Hudson's Bay* (1848 *et seq.*). But not until a full-scale book is published, written by a sympathetic historian who has steeped himself in the records and in the period, will the long and romantic history of York Fort come alive upon the printed page.

# The Beaver



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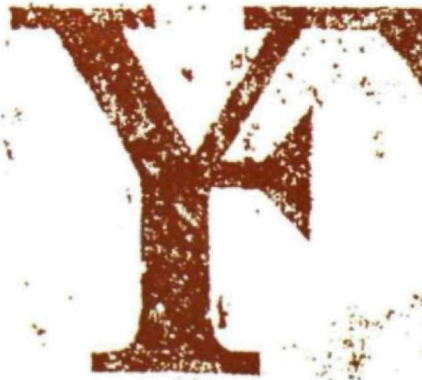
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*Clifford Wilson, Editor*

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